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Keeping up Appearances

A FARCE IN ONE ACT

BY
W. W. JACOBS



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A Farce in One Act

BY
W. W. JACOBS

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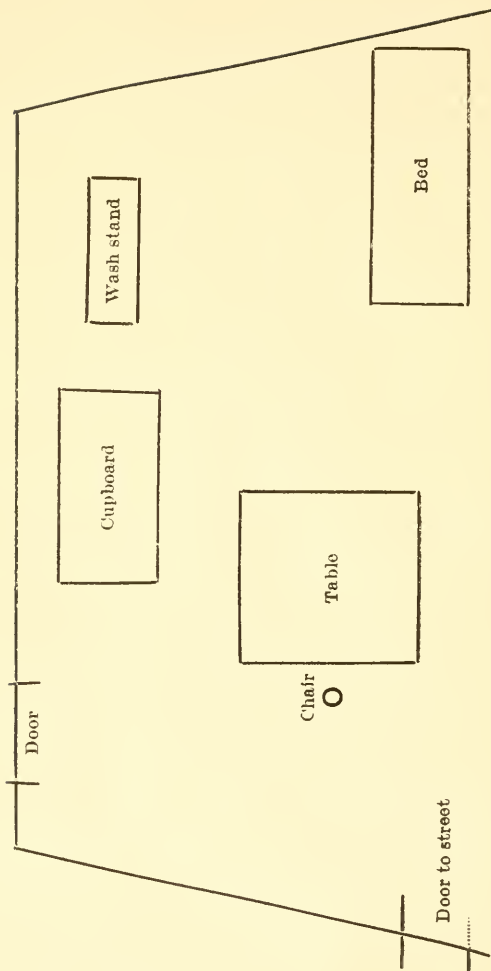
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KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

Produced on April 17, 1915, at the Savoy Theatre, London,
with the following cast of characters:—

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| BILL BURTENSHAW (aged fifty) | . . | <i>Mr. Tom Reynolds.</i> |
| MRS. BURTENSHAW (about forty-five) | . . | <i>Miss Clare Greet.</i> |
| SILAS WINCH (aged fifty) | . . . | <i>Mr. James Lindsay.</i> |



KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

SCENE. *A miserably furnished room with stained and dilapidated wall-paper, etc. On the left a bed, with only a mattress on it, stands with its head against the wall, and a big patched counterpane hanging over the foot. L.C. a shabby stained washstand, containing basin and jug with broken spout; a piece of unframed glass hangs on wall by side of it. A cheap deal table stands in centre of room with large teacup and saucer, etc. A crust of bread on plate, and a lighted lamp with smoky chimney. A large cupboard stands against wall R.C. At back a door leads to kitchen and there is a door R. opening into the street down stage.*

When the curtain rises, MRS. BURTENSHAW, a miserable-looking woman of forty-five, very shabbily dressed, is discovered seated at table. She squeezes a little more tea out of the teapot, empties cup and puts it down with a sigh. She rises, shakes mattress, throws counterpane over bed, puts jug straight in basin and dusts chair with her apron. She seats herself again and rises at sound of a knock on front door. She opens it and reveals SILAS WINCH. SILAS is a woebegone looking man of about fifty; long white face, dank hair on forehead, little hair on chin.

SILAS. Is Mr. Bill Burtenshaw in?

MRS. BURTENSHAW. No.

SILAS. Oh, will he be back soon? I want to see him on a little matter o' business. (*He enters in a shuffling fashion and MRS. BURTENSHAW closes door.*)

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Is it very particular business ?

SILAS. Very particular for me, yes.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. It's rather late.

SILAS. It ain't quite eleven yet, and I ain't seen 'im for so long that the moment I found out where 'e was living I came along. How is 'e ?

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*briefly*). Same as usual. (*Regards him closely.*) If you wait a moment I'll get another chair from the kitchen.

(*During her absence SILAS walks round and in a disconcerted fashion examines bed, washstand, etc., peers into cup and milk jug. Re-enter MRS. BURTENSHAW. She has a chair in one hand and a leg and cross bar to it in the other. SILAS regards her open-eyed.*)

MRS. BURTENSHAW. If you can just stick this leg in we shall be comfortable.

(*The two of them adjust the chair ; SILAS places it on the floor and hastily takes the other. He cranes his neck and looks round the room three times in succession slowly. He coughs gently.*)

SILAS. I thought Bill was doing well.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. So 'e is.

SILAS (*coughs*). I suppose 'e likes room to stretch 'imself about in.

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*wiping her eyes*). He is making two pound a week ; two pound a week, and this is my share of it.

SILAS. Two pound a week ! What does 'e do with it all ?

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*goes through pantomime of drinking from empty cup, and eyes him significantly*). But not out of a tea cup, and not tea. A better 'usband when 'e is sober you couldn't wish to see. He'd give me anything—if 'e 'ad it.

SILAS. Can't you stop 'im ?

MRS. BURTENSHAW. No, 'e can't stop 'imself. He tries 'ard too, poor dear ; why, once he told me to empty

a bucket of cold water over 'im the next time 'e came 'ome bad.

SILAS. Did it do 'im any good ?

MRS. BURTENSHAW. No. Me neither. I spent the night in the back yard. Raining it was.

SILAS. 'Ard ?

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*snappishly*). 'Ard enough.

SILAS. It's a bit orkard. As a matter of fact I'm a bit down on my luck, and I called round 'oping that Bill could lend me a bit till I could pull round.

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*shaking her head*). Lend ! Why, 'e's pawned everything in the place. He's pawned the bedclothes, and we have to sleep in our clothes of a night. He'd 'ave pawned the counterpane if the pawnbroker would 'ave let 'im. This is all the furniture we've got except a cask of beer in the kitchen.

SILAS (*half rising and speaking very earnestly*). Beer ! D'yer think it ought to be left for 'im ? D'yer think it's right to leave temptation in the cask ? Suppose——

MRS. BURTENSHAW. He's got the key in his pocket.

SILAS. In his pocket ? One time 'e was as open-anded a man as you'd wish for to see. We was unseparable shipmates for years. We thought nothing would part us, and I remember we each gave each other a bit of paper signed in our own blood saying as 'ow the one as died fust would appear to the other.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. I know, I've seen it. Bill often said 'e wished 'e hadn't done it. He said it gave 'im cold creeps down 'is back when he thought of you dying fust.

SILAS. A-ah.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. And when 'e thought of 'imself dying fust, it gave 'im cold creeps all over.

SILAS (*shakes his head, sighs, and looks round the room again*). Well, I suppose I can stay and see him. Me and 'im used to be great pals at one time, and many's the good turn I've done 'im. What time will 'e be 'ome ?

MRS. BURTENSHAW. If 'e waits till the pubs close,

after twelve. If the landlord won't wait, 'e'll be a bit earlier.

SILAS. I'll wait.

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*eyes him and then speaks suddenly*). No, you'd better go. I've just thought of it. You see, 'im being in that condition 'e might think you was your own ghost come according to promise and be frightened out of 'is life. He's wonderful superstitious.

SILAS. That don't matter. P'raps a shock might do 'im good.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Nothing will do 'im any good now. (SILAS *sits looking at floor, pushes his cap up and scratches his head*.)

SILAS. I don't know that. If he mistook me for a ghost, it might 'ave a good effect on 'im. Look 'ere, if you come to that, why shouldn't I pretend to be my own ghost, drowned at sea, and warn 'im off the drink?

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*loudly*). Wot!

SILAS (*smirking*). Pretend to be my own ghost. I'm a wonderful actor when I give my mind to it.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. But——

SILAS. It's as easy as easy I tell you. You 'ide me 'ere, and after 'e's gone to bed I'll come out and give 'im the shock of 'is life.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. I couldn't think of it. Pore Bill!

SILAS. You give me a little flour to put on my face.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. I couldn't think of it. The idea! (*She crosses to door and pauses*.) Anything else besides the flour? What about a little butter to make it stick on?

SILAS (*as MRS. BURTENSHAW exit*). Anything you like—phosphorus would be the thing, but I ain't got any. (*Enter MRS. BURTENSHAW with flour in basin, which she places on table. She takes a lump of butter from plate on table and approaches SILAS*.)

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Stand still. (*Business. Taking up basin of flour*.) Stand still! (*Throws little bits of flour in his face. He steps to glass and surveys himself. She*

eyes him reflectively.) You ought to be dripping wet all over. Could you get under the tap, or shall I throw a bucket of water over you ?

SILAS (*vaguely*). We'll see ; perhaps I'd better *pretend* to be wet. Where shall I 'ide ?

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*pointing to cupboard*). In there, when 'e comes. I'm sure it's very kind of you to take all this trouble for nothing.

SILAS. Don't mention it. It ain't the fust time, and I don't suppose it'll be the last, that I've put myself out to 'elp my fellow-creatures. We all ought to 'elp each other.

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*trembling*). Mind, if 'e finds it out, I don't know nothing about it. P'raps to make it more life-like I'd better pretend not to see you.

SILAS. P'raps it would be better. All I ask is that you'll 'ide the poker and anything else that may be laying about handy ; Bill acts afore he thinks sometimes.

(*Noise and voices heard outside.*)

MRS. BURTENSHAW. There he is. Quick ! (*She snatches SILAS'S cap from his head while he stands gazing after her. She dips it in jug of water and, returning, places it firmly on his head. SILAS stands a picture of indignant misery. As he protests she pushes him into cupboard. Exit.*) All right ; I'm coming, Bill ! (*Murmur of voices grows louder as MRS. BURTENSHAW opens door a little and glances at cupboard. Voice of BILL outside.*)

BILL. 'Oo are you shoving ? You nearly 'ad me down.

VOICE. You are shoving yourself, Bill.

BILL. I'll fight the whole twenty of you. I'll fight the—— Who are you shoving of ? (*Bumping sounds heard.*)

VOICE (*angrily*). Take 'im and shove 'is head under the tap and keep it there. Good night, Mrs. Burtenshaw.

(BILL enters suddenly and clings desperately to his wife. He draws himself up and eyes her scornfully, reels against wall and staggers, hits it one or two heavy blows. MRS. BURTENSHAW assists him to a chair and takes his boots off. He falls asleep, she raises him and conducts him to the bed, puts him in, up stage. She moves about room; hides poker, boots, etc., under the bed. She glances at cupboard, sits down and removes boots. A loud sneeze is heard from cupboard; she starts; another sneeze. She glances at bed and sneezes herself violently. BILL snores; she smiles and gets gingerly into bed. She raises her head once or twice, looks at BILL, and then at cupboard. Head of SILAS protrudes from cupboard. She beckons. SILAS advances and leans over foot of bed. He utters a heartrending groan. Another groan increasing in intensity; then three more groans. SILAS with his fingers to his throat looks interrogatively at MRS. BURTENSHAW and then at BILL.)

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*in loud whisper*). Try a squeaky one. (SILAS tries five squeaky ones, and has a bad fit of coughing. MRS. BURTENSHAW feigns sleep. She sits up again.) Now some more deep ones.

(SILAS, licking lips, tries some bass groans, pauses again and in an injured fashion looks at MRS. BURTENSHAW.)

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Now mix 'em a bit.

SILAS (*snappishly in a hoarse whisper*). Look 'ere, do you think I'm a fog 'orn, or wot?

(He stands with his eyes turned upwards, thinking, nods at MRS. BURTENSHAW, and makes noises in imitation of steam siren. BILL moves restlessly in his sleep, turns and regards MRS. BURTENSHAW.)

BILL. D'ye hear, stop it! stop it at once!

(MRS. BURTENSHAW feigns sleep. BILL turns over again and SILAS emits a plaintive little moan. BILL sits up with extraordinary haste, catches sight of SILAS, gives a shout of terror, and rolls over wrapped in entire

counterpane. MRS. BURTENSHAW clutches at it with a little cry and tries to get some of it back ; BILL holds on to it desperately.)

SILAS (*in an awful voice*). Bill ! Bill Burtenshaw ! (*One of BILL'S feet is seen in the air ; his back is bent and he has the appearance of trying to bore through the bed.*) Bill, why don't you answer me ? I've come all the way from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean to see you, and this is all I get for it ! 'Aven't you got anything to say to me ?

BILL (*in a smothered voice*). Good-bye.

SILAS (*groans again, BILL trembles and bed shakes*). The moment I died I thought of my promise toward you. Bill's expecting of me, I says, and instead of staying in comfort at the bottom of the sea I kicked off the body of the cabin boy wot was clinging round my leg ; and 'ere I am !

BILL. It was very—t-t-thoughtful of you—Silas—but you always was—thoughtful. Good-bye !

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*sitting up and looking around*). Lor' bless me, Bill, whatever are you talking to yourself like this for ? Are you dreaming or wot ?

BILL (*gripping her fiercely by the arm*). Dreaming—dreaming ! I wish I was. Look at it !

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Look at what ?

BILL. At the bottom of the bed. Can't you see it ?

MRS. BURTENSHAW. See what ?

BILL (*in a hoarse whisper*). The ghost—the ghost of my dear, kind old pal, Silas Winch ; the best and noblest pal a man ever 'ad. The kindest-'arted——

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Rubbish ! you've been dreaming, and as for the kindest-'arted pal, why, I've often 'eard you say——

BILL. *Hsh !* I didn't, I'll swear I didn't. I never thought of such a thing !

MRS. BURTENSHAW. You turn over and go to sleep ; 'iding your 'ead under the clothes like a child that's afraid of the dark. There's nothing there I tell you.

I wonder what you'll see next ! Last time it was a pink rat.

BILL. This is fifty million times worse than pink rats. I only wish it *was* a pink rat.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. I tell you there's nothing there. Look ! (BILL *puts his head up and looks, then with a dreadful scream dives convulsively under the clothes again.*) Oh well, have it your own way then. If it pleases you to think there is a ghost there, and to go on talking to it, do so and welcome.

(*She turns over and pretends to sleep again.*)

SILAS (*in a hollow voice*). Bill !

BILL (*with a groan*). Yes——

SILAS. She can't see me and can't 'ear me. She ain't meant to, but I'm 'ere all right. Look !

BILL (*head still under clothes*). I 'ave looked.

SILAS. We was always pals, Bill, you and me. Many a v'y'ge 'ave we 'ad together, mate ; and now I'm laying at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, and you are snug and 'appy in your own warm bed. I 'ad to come to see you according to promise ; and over and above that, since I was drowneded my eyes 'ave been opened. Bill, you're drinking of yourself to death.

BILL (*shaking*). I—I—didn't know it. I'll knock it off a bit—and—thank you—for—w-warning me ; g-g-good-bye.

SILAS (*in an awful voice*). You're to knock it off altogether. Altogether, d'ye hear ? You're not to touch another drop of beer, wine, or spirits, as long as you live. D'ye hear me ?

BILL (*holding clothes up but not looking over them*). Not—not as medicine ?

SILAS. Not as *anything*, not even over Christmas pudding. Raise your right arm above your 'ead and swear by the ghost of pore Silas Winch as is laying at the bottom of the ocean, that you won't touch another drop.

BILL (*raising a very trembling arm*). I swear that

I'll never touch another drop of wine or spirits, or——
Does it matter about beer, Silas ?

SILAS. Yes.

BILL (*groaning*). Or beer, as long as I live. (*Takes in arm and groans movingly.*)

SILAS. If ever you break your oath by only so much as a teaspoonful you'll see me again, and the second time you see me you'll die as if struck by lightning. No man can see me twice and live.

BILL (*in a quavering voice*). *Eh !* You'll be careful, won't you, Silas ? You'll remember you've seen me once, I mean.

SILAS. I'll remember, and mind *you* do. I'm going now, but afore I go there's one thing I want to say : I've a widder, a pore broken-'arted widder, and if she don't get 'elp from some one she'll starve.

BILL. Pore thing, pore thing.

SILAS (*very solemnly*). If you 'ad died afore me, I should 'ave looked arter your good wife—wot I've now put in a sound sleep—as long as I lived. (*BILL has a mild attack of coughing.*) I should 'ave given 'er fifteen—shillings—a—week.

(MRS. BURTENSHAW *raises left fist and shakes it fiercely at SILAS.*)

BILL (*nearly raising his head, and voice squeaky with surprise*). 'Ow much ?

SILAS (*in an awful voice*). Fifteen shillings. You'll save that and more over the drink ; besides, it ought to be a pleasure to you.

BILL. I—I'll go round and see 'er. She might be one of these 'er independent——

SILAS. I forbid you to go near the place. Send it by post every week. Number 10 Shand Street will find her. Put your arm up and swear it as you did afore.

BILL (*raising arm*). I swear to send fifteen bob every week to Mrs. Winch at 10 Shand Street, and I'll never go near the place.

SILAS. You've got a barrel of beer in the kitchen ; the moment I've gone, go down and empty it.

BILL. Waste it, Silas ? Waste all that good beer ? Why, I'd sooner my missis 'ad it ! I would indeed.

SILAS. Empty it at once. Then's my orders. Farewell ! Farewell ! I'm going back to my bed at the bottom of the sea. So long as you keep both your oaths I'll stay there. If you break one of them or go to see my poor wife, I'll appear again and you'll die sudden. Farewell ! (*Exit on tiptoe.*)

BILL. Good-bye. (*Pause.*) 'Ave you gorn, Silas ? (*Pause.*) 'Ave you gorn, Silas ? Is it safe for me to get up and empty the beer. (*Holds quilt tightly and peers over edge of it. Gradually sits up in bed and looks around. Steps gingerly out of bed and exit at kitchen.* MRS. BURTENSHAW *sits on edge of bed and gesticulates violently. Head of SILAS pushes in at door.*)

SILAS. H'sh ! I can't open the front door.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Ah ! I've got the key.

SILAS. Give it to me.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Not much, I won't. You low thief ! How dare you try and do that pore lamb out of fifteen bob a week !

SILAS. You open the front door ! If 'e finds me 'ere mind, and I 'ave to tell 'im your little game, think of the bashing you'll get !

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Think of the bashing *you'll* get !

SILAS. Make haste, he'll be back in a minute.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. No 'e won't, that beer runs very slow ; besides, 'e won't 'ave the 'art to run it off quick, 'e's smelling it.

SILAS. Are you going to open the door or are you not ?

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*walks up and down the room thinking. She looks at SILAS, goes cautiously to kitchen door and looks, comes back thinking ; suddenly laughs and waves key.*) Yes, come along. It's all right, I know what to do now.

SILAS. *Do !*

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*laughing*). Yes, how to do you

out of fifteen bob a week, you buttery-faced pirate !
(*Laughs and waves key.*) Come along, come along, ghostie ! I don't mind seeing you twice !

SILAS. Yes, but look 'ere.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Come along !

SILAS (*solemnly*). If you tell 'im, 'e'll 'arf kill you, mind, besides drinking worse than ever.

MRS. BURTENSHAW. I'm not going to tell 'im ; make 'aste, 'e's coming back.

(SILAS *prances out on tiptoe followed by* MRS. BURTENSHAW. *She gets back into bed ; sad, heavy, steps of* BILL *are heard approaching. He sobs twice.*)

BILL. Three gallons of it if there was a pint, down the sink. Wish I was a sink ! (*Shakes head miserably and with a heavy sigh climbs back into bed with his back towards* MRS. BURTENSHAW. *She faces audience, turns head two or three times to gaze at* BILL. *Suddenly she utters a wild shriek. Quilt is seen to rise and hide the burrowing form of* BILL.)

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Oh ! Oh ! Oh ! (*Pause.*) What ! Silas Winch ! Drowned ! (*Pause, she shakes* BILL *by the shoulder.*) Bill, 'ere's somebody wants to see you ! (*BILL shudders under clothes.*) Wot do you say ? You don't want to see Bill because if 'e sees you he'll die. (*Throws arms protectingly around form of* BILL, *long pause.*) Oh ! (*Pause.*) Eh ! (*Pause.*) What ! What ! (*Pause.*) I'm to bring you fifteen shillings every week to 10 Shand Street ! Bill, is that right ? 'Ave I got your consent ? Put up your 'and if you mean yes. (*Hand of* BILL *appears above bedclothes and waves feebly.*) All right, Mr. Winch, I'll bring it myself then : by 'and every week. No, Bill shan't come, I'll promise that for 'im. I'm sorry you was drowned. Do go away, 'e might put 'is 'ead up at any moment. (*Begins to gasp and sob, puts a couple of pillows on* BILL's *head and leans on them. Loudly.*) Thank you, Mr. Winch, I 'ope you'll find your way back to the Pacific Ocean all

right. Good-bye—Good-bye. (*Sits on edge of bed, looks at form of BILL, and has a mild attack of hysterics. BILL's head with eyes shut protrudes from near foot of bed.*)

BILL (*in a husky whisper*). 'As it gorn?

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*with a sob*). Oh, Bill, I've seen a ghost! It's the one you said you saw, Silas Winch.

BILL. 'As it gorn?

MRS. BURTENSHAW. Yes, it's gone. Oh, Bill, it stood at the foot of the bed looking at me with its face and 'ands all shiny white and damp curls all over its forehead. (*BILL comes up very slowly and carefully with his eyes shut, facing the audience.*) You can open your eyes now, Bill. (*BILL opens his eyes and looks slowly around.*) You will give me the fifteen shillings a week, won't you, Bill? I shouldn't like to lose you, Bill!

BILL. I shouldn't like to lose myself. Mind, if you should lose it or be robbed of it, take care and let me know at once. D'ye hear? At once, mind.

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*meekly*). Yes, Bill.

BILL. And the next time a man tells you he has seen a ghost perhaps you'll believe 'im.

MRS. BURTENSHAW (*stuffing end of quilt in her mouth*). Yes, Bill.

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